Community Affairs File

Clark, Dorothy

# Terre Haute's Early Fire Losses Are Chronicled

By DOROTHY J. CLARK

Ts JUN 17 1973

Fires were common occurrences in early Terre Haute, but were seldom reported in the newspapers of the day unless there was considerable loss of life or property. With the use of candles, kerosene, lanterns, open fireplaces, stoves with unsteady stovepipes, etc., it stands to reason there were many fires in the homes, stores, and business buildings here.

Newspapers of those days were not truly "news papers," for the people of the community had the news before the editor. Then, too, many of the early papers were weeklies and the news was frequently six days old when the paper arrived on the street. The newspaper was more or less a printed chronicle of events.

From the WESTERN REGISTER AND TERRE HAUTE ADVERTISER we learn that "On the evening of the 5th John F. King's Distillery in the occupancy of Mark Williams and Mr. King was destroyed by fire." This was in February, 1825.

John F. King was one of our pioneers. A member of his family was the second wife of Curtis Gilbert. Israeal, the brother of Mark Williams, married the sister of Chauncey Rose.

After the fire, Mr. King built a linseed oil mill on the same lot and operated it for many years. This was sold about 1840 and was destroyed many years later in the Fourth street fire.

DOROTHY J. CLARK

At about eight o'clock on the morning of December 2, 1850, fire broke out in Diehl's Coffee House and spread east to the alley between Third and Fourth on the north side of Wabash. The new Union Row east of the alley was saved by its iron shutters and brick construction, but all to Third and about half way to Cherry was burned.

The largest losers were W. D. Griswold; Ezra W. Smith and John Routledge, who estimated their losses at from ten to twelve thousand dollars, considerable money in those days.

Totally destroyed also was McQuilkin's Coffee House, the dry goods stores of Tuell, Bosworth, and Marshall (and the latter's warehouse), the Universalist Printing House, and John Dowling's old frame house in which he had published the WABASH COURIER for years.

The new building that was erected on these ruins on Wabash was named Phoenix Row because it had risen from the ashes of the other.

Three years later, on May 10, 1853, the soap and candle factory of B. M. Harrison caught fire. The grease and oil caused destruction so great that it was declared a total loss. It was located on the hill south of the present Water Works between Water and First Street, and four years later Charley Nehf was born in the house erected on this location.

At about two o'clock in the morning of April 14, 1854, fire broke out in a long frame building at Fourth and Main which had been used as barracks for the Mexican War soldiers. It burned east through A. C. Furrow's and Joyce's Grocery stores, Hedden's Shoe Store, Houriet's Jewelry Store, Hennock's Clothing, J. B. Furrow's Grocery, and the establishment of John C. Ross on the alley.

South from Wabash to Ohio it took the frame buildings of Coate's Paint Shop, another shoe store, the office of Dr. Fahnestock, Patrick and Brown's Paint Shop, Ball and Lockwood's Tin Shop, Henry Fairbank's Rifle Shop, the Vigo Schales, Graces's Marble Works, Dodson's Grocery,

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TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA

Neumeister's Confectionery, Dimmick's Cabinet Shop and Chadwick and Westfall's Livery Stable.

A month later fire started in the N. P. Talmadge Livery Stable on Mulberry, destroying the stages and the horses of the Western Stage Company, Archer's Carriage Shop, the Prairie City Hotel, Burton's Hotel and stables, and the wagon shop of the Western Stage Company located on Fourth Street.

On October 4th, at about two o'clock in the morning, Mahan's Store next to the

**Continued On Page 11, Col. 1.**

Southern Bank at the southwest corner of Fourth and Wabash was found on fire. When it was extinguished, it was discovered that the safe was open and from three to five hundred dollars was missing.

On April 26, 1856, the Poor House was destroyed completely, but luckily without loss of lives. The Commissioners then bought the property on East Maple Avenue and erected a building. The old location was opposite Woodrow Wilson Junior High School on Poplar Street, and following the fire it was bought by Judge Deming.

On the northeast corner of Fourth and Cherry, later the site of the old Filbeck Hotel, was Johnny Burton's Old Pavillion and Hotel. It was destroyed by fire on August 16, 1856, and for some twenty years previous had been the principle stage office and hotel in town.

Then two months later, on October 15, the Prairie House, which was on the grounds of the present Terre Haute House, had a fire in the north "Ell" with a loss of about ten thousand dollars.

On Christmas Day, 1858, Curtis Gilbert had a fire at his home east of the city that was reported to have been caused by fire crackers, but he denied this as the cause.

A fire started in a small frame building on Ohio Street on October 8, 1864, and destroyed the Town Hall, but the records were saved.

In this period of forty years, the town of Terre Haute had progressed from the primitive "bucket brigade" to an organized fire department. Those interested in the subject of fire-fighting can view the horse-drawn fire wagons in miniature scale models at the Historical Museum, 1411 South Sixth Street, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday through Friday

# The Powder Mill Explosion At Fontanet 66 Years Ago

Community Affairs File

By DOROTHY J. CLARK

Ts OCT 14 1973

Located in the northern part of Vigo County in Nevins Township, the town of Fontanet is almost a ghost town compared to what it was in 1889 when there was a population of some 1,500.

Named Fountain by the early settlers because of a fountain-head spring which flows through the hills to a point where the present town is located, and which supplied them with an unlimited supply of water, the town had one store and a few scattered homes.

Rich deposits of coal were found in the area and with the sinking of several deep shaft mines and later the construction of the DuPont Powder Mill, Fontanet grew rapidly. The town became a booming mining town.

With the coming of the railroad the community was divided into two almost equal parts known as the North Hill and the South Hill. At this time the name had again been changed to Fountanett.

When the post office was established the name was changed to its present Fontanet to avoid conflict with another town of a similar name.

The Coal Bluff Mining Company founded by the Talley brothers operated two deep shaft mines. Three of their mines were at nearby Coal Bluff.

Some of the early mines were the Minshall, Plymouth, Diamond, Mary, Lotten, Old Star, Union, Monkey, Old Town Mine, Peerless (also called Moses) and Victor.

DOROTHY J. CLARK

On Wednesday morning, October 16, 1907, the powder mill located a little south of Fontanet exploded. The first blast occurred about 9:15 a.m., and the fourth and last about ninety minutes later. Not a building in Fontanet was undamaged and 150 houses at Coal Bluff, a short distance away, were partially wrecked.

Caused by an overheated shaft in the glazing department coming in contact with particles of powder dust, the first explosion occurred about 9:15 a.m. The second explosion was in the press mill. It was never determined where the third blast took place, but the fourth and last explosion was that of four tons of dynamite in the magazine section. At one time during the ninety minutes fraught with blasts, 300 tons of black powder exploded.

The shock was felt in Terre Haute and Brazil. Downtown store windows were broken. Seismographs in Ohio recorded the shock felt as far away as St. Mary's, Ohio.

Employees of the powder mill, which had seven different compartments and buildings, were caught in the explosion and were either killed or injured.

The workmen's clothes were filled with powder, and the flames which spread over the plant after the first explosion

Continued On Page 7, Col. 2.

ignited their clothing, causing horrible injuries. Arms, fingers and ears were torn off by the force of the blasts, while several had their eyes nearly burned out. Several men were brought to Terre Haute hospitals with parts of their bodies burned to a crisp.

Townspeople rushed to the mill site to aid the injured, working frantically to give first aid and get them on special trains to local hospitals. Within thirty minutes after the disaster, ten to fifteen doctors were on the scene. Local newspapers borrowed automobiles from the few persons in the city who owned them to send their reporters to cover the explosion which was front page news for about two weeks.

Workers picked up the dead and removed them to a safe spot for later identification. Fontanet was draped in mourning for the 27 dead. When the funerals began, crowds estimated at 12,000 a day visited the scene and hampered clean-up and rescue work until barred from the area. All roads were closed to spectators. Carl Stahl and Camille Urban were among the first persons from Terre Haute to reach the scene.

The DuPont Company sent $5,000 to Gov. J. Frank Hanly to be used for relief and rebuilt all houses at company expense. When they planned to rebuild the powder mill, the Fontanet citizens petitioned against it. One disaster was enough.

Gov. Hanly sent Company B of the State Militia, 700 cots and 100 tents for the women and children, medical supplies and emergency food, etc. He came to Fontanet to see for himself the extent of the damage.

The explosion changed the entire face of the earth in the area. Great holes were torn in the ground and into these poured a molten mass of smoking, gaseous sulphur brimstone. Masses of chemicals and materials formed in lakes and poured over into the creek. Huge trees were torn and broken.

At Montezuma, twenty miles from Fontanet, a piece of hard pine lumber, sixteen inches long, was blown through a window in Gus Borley's home and imbedded itself in the wall.

Four school children from the Fontanet school were found wandering four miles from the scene near Ehrmandale. They had no idea how they had gotten there.

Supt. A. B. Monahan was burned to death in his office. His house was demolished, his wife burned to death in the basement. Her sister and niece living with them also died from burns.

Among the buildings totally destroyed were the Methodist and Christian churches, two school buildings, depot, all business blocks including one just completed, large warehouse, 500 homes and a Big Four freight train on the switch leading to the mill. Engineer Charles Wells was badly burned and leg fractured. Structures rocked and splintered at the first explosion were totally destroyed after the second blast. Damage totalling some $350,000 was estimated.

The town was rebuilt, but the industry left. After the explosion it never was the thriving community it had been previously.

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# Recall Train Wrecks on

Community Affairs File

Railroads (T.H.)

# The Big Four Bridge

By DOROTHY J. CLARK

Ts OCT 23 1973

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On Friday, Oct. 28, 1892, two freight train engines collided on the Big Four Wabash river bridge.

Just before 7 o'clock that morning, a freight train running at a dangerous rate of speed plunged into the engine of another freight train on the river bridge with a crash that was heard for a mile. For an instant there was silence, then came the second crash, not so loud or startling as the first, but which carried terror to the hearts of all who knew the sound. The bridge had given away.

One span of the iron bridge constructed in 1881 had collapsed from the tremendous strain and into the river the two engines were hurled, with Engineer Wesley Allison still at his post. Several freight cars were drawn down with the engines. For some time after the crash nothing could be seen except a cloud of dust, steam and flying fragments of timbers.

When the air cleared a little hundreds of spectators rushed to the scene and stood about looking for the supposed dead and wounded. It was reported at first that all the enginemen were missing as well as some of the stockmen. This was later found to be a mistake. The loss of life was limited to one brave man who stuck to his post and went down with the wreck.

Engineer Wesley Allison was the only man missing. He held the throttle on stock train No. 42 and was coming in at high speed. He saw his danger and whistled for brakes, but his signal was either too late or the brakes failed to act. The engine, No. 341, collided with No. 320, which was standing on the bridge, with sufficient force to drive it almost on top of the silent locomotive.

DOROTHY J. CLARK

Fireman Sowers, of No. 341, jumped from the engine just outside the bridge and escaped without injury. But the engineer went down with the wreck.

Engineer Flynn of No. 320, heard Allison's cry of horror as he found himself going down, and a man who lived near the scene said he saw Allison struggling in the water moments afterward, but he was unable to go to his assistance. Allison's struggles were brief and feeble. There was little doubt he had received serious injuries before he struck the water.

The entire second span of the bridge from the east side was down. Below in a confused heap were the remains of two locomotives and eight or ten cars.

Engine No. 320 was completely under water and the other engine lay at the base of the pier in a broken and confused mass. At its side lay three or four stock cars, while from above one car hung suspended from each side in a way that the slightest jar would send them down into the river.

The stock cars were loaded with cattle and the noise made by the frightened and injured animals was almost deafening. About a dozen head of cattle escaped from the wrecked cars and swam to land.

One of the waterworks employees who witnessed the collision described the scene as follows: "I heard both engines whistle. The engine of the train on this side had reached the draw and was at a standstill. The eastbound train came around the curve at what appeared to be 75 miles an hour. It was the fraction of a minute until the crash came. The flying engine seemed to jump into the air like a living monster trying to leap over an obstruction. The shock drove the motionless engine back to the other span. Then the bridge gave way and the engines parted. The second crash was deafening. It took some time for the cloud of dust and steam to subside so I could see what happened. Then I could see nothing but the piles of rubbish floating away and could only hear the hissing of the steam and the bellowing of the injured cattle."

Engineer Allison's body was not recovered until April 23, 1893, almost six months after the accident. The widow and children living at Mattoon survived him.

A similar train wreck occurred some eight years later on the Big Four railroad bridge over the Wabash River here. On Feb. 23, 1900, a freight train composed of 45 loaded cars, four empties, an engine and two cabooses left Mattoon at 10 o'clock.

The freight cars were loaded with spelter, merchandise, baled cotton, bran, meal, paper wrappers, stove ovens, bulk middlings, pig lead, bulk clay, lumber, corn, oil and wood.

Engineer Harry Adams, interviewed at Union Hospital where he was being treated for injuries, gave the following account: "When we came around the curve just before going on the bridge the fireman said to me "All right," which means that the bridge was clear. He could not get a full view of the bridge, but did not see anything that was not all right. We were going at about 10 miles an hour when the engine went on the bridge. Just as we touched it, Ruddell cried out, 'My God, look out!' I looked out the window and saw that the track was out of line and threw down my seat, expecting to jump, but the next thing I knew I felt the cold water and found myself paddling around in the water. I got a hold on something and knew that I could keep from sinking. I heard Ruddell groaning and called



to him. He said that he was fast and burning . . . He became so weak that he could not keep his head out of water and I tarew him a board. He rested his head on the board, and that is all I remember. I do not know how I got out, but they tell me that I walked on the ice, and after they pulled me on the bridge that I walked to the bank. The fireman was parboiled, I am sure, as he was jammed between the coal-gate and the fire-door. He could not move and the escaping steam must have burned him. He tried to jump when he called to me, and was out of his seat and just ready to go when he went down. The brakeman had just left the cab, and was either going over the tank or was on the first car . . . If anyone knew of the dangerous condition of the bridge they did not try to flag us."

Continued Next Week . . .

Community Affairs File

Is NOV 4 1973

# More About Train Wrecks On the Big Four Bridge

Community Affairs File
Railroads (T.H.)

Is NOV 4 1973 By DOROTHY J. CLARK

Last week's column told of the Big Four railroad bridge over the Wabash river here at Terre Haute and the two major disasters connected with it since it was constructed in 1881. The first big train wreck on the old iron bridge occurred between two freight trains on Oct. 28, 1892. The second wreck occurred Feb. 23, 1900, and was also between two freight trains.

Big Four Railroad Superintendent Duane (for whom Duane Yards is named) said: "The pier which gave way has been standing for nearly thirty years, and to all appearances was as good as the day it was put in. The manner in which it was undermined precluded all possibility of its condition being discovered in time to avert the accident. The water had sapped the foundations far down below the water line and until the weight of the train disclosed the fact that the structure was unsafe, we had no knowledge of it."

L. E. Short, of Mattoon, was the conductor in charge of the ill-fated train and was riding in the caboose with the brakeman when the bridge gave way.

The brakeman, with rare courage and presence of mind, sprang out on the platform and set the brakes, his action preventing the dozen or more cars left standing on the track from plunging into the river with the rest.

Conductor Short said there were 49 freight cars in the train and all fell into the river except 13. The conductor jumped as soon as the brakes were set and the brakeman did likewise, both escaping without a scratch.

DOROTHY J. CLARK

Conductor Short was beginning to think he bore a charmed life, as he was in a smash-up the week before and came out unhurt. He was riding in his caboose, the same as this time, when a wreck occurred in which his car was totally demolished. Short jumped for his life and stood by while his caboose was being ground to pieces.

George Wilson, Harry Brown and Charles Williams, a trio of tramps, were in one of the middle cars when the bridge collapsed, but managed to get out unhurt. When the engine went down there was a jar which shook the entire train and the tramps sprang to their feet and looked out. They made haste in getting out and a few seconds after they reached the ground their car had plunged into the river and became a part of the wreckage under the water.

The three men were given lodging at the jail that night and left town the next morning. They said they boarded the train at Paris and so far as they knew there were no other tramps in any of the cars.

A fortunate combination of circumstances was responsible for the fact that the loss of life was not something horrible. Train No. 11, which was the Southwestern Limited, one of the fast-flying passenger trains over the road, had orders to meet train No. 438, which accounts for the high rate of speed at which the train was running. Had he decided to take a siding west of the river to wait for the fast passenger as would not have been out of the ordinary, the Southwestern Limited, with its loaded passenger cars, would have been hurled to the bottom of the river.

Another coincidence that probably saved two lives was the breaking down of engine No. 438. When the train was ordered it had been decided to run a double-header to Terre Haute. The repairs on No. 438 could not be completed in time, hence the train was run with a single engine. The train men who escaped went to their homes at Indianapolis that night on the Knickerbocker, which was run from Paris to Terre Haute over the tracks of the T.H. & P.

Supt. W. M. Duane, of the Big Four, told a GAZETTE reporter: "We put a hundred men to work repairing the broken span of the bridge today and will put another shift of another hundred on tonight. We expect to have the span repaired so that trains can pass over within five days. If the ice was not so bad and the weather was better we could have trains over in three days. The delay to through Big Four travel will be an hour."

The Big Four bridge wreck was the reigning sensation in town, but the sudden cold wave kept the crowds down that visited the scene. Outside of the inconvenience to Big Four travel, the loss to the company was estimated at $100,000.

Fireman Dan Ruddell died at the hospital the night of the wreck. He was terribly injured. According to the attending physician, Ruddell was able to tell something of the accident. He told that the engineer and himself saw that the bridge was out of plumb before they struck it, and that the engineer tried his best to stop the train but they were going too fast and could do nothing.

Charles Baldwin, who had boats to rent on the river bank, and his wife tried to stop the train, as they noticed it was swaying to and fro, but they were not in time to do it, although they tried to do so.

Engineer Adams and Fireman Ruddell both lived as neighbors at Brightwood. Ruddell was caught in the gangway of the engine and pinned down under the wreckage. He was fast against the boilerhead and his entire body was scalded from the escaping steam.

As soon as he saw the bridge was going away, Brakeman Whiteman started back on the train, but only reached the top of the tank when the crash came. He was caught between the first car and the engine and both of his legs were badly crushed.

The next morning the wrecked cars in the river caught fire from a sky rocket that was fired with a line from one side of the river to the other igniting the cotton. The flames soon spread and the fire became so threatening that it was necessary to call out the fire department to save the bridge. A car of oil and the baled cotton helped spread the fire, which hampered the wrecking crews and threatened the wagon bridge as the flaming wreckage floated downstream.

Enterprising citizens were salvaging the bales of cotton and other freight from the river and charging ten dollars a bale from the railroad. It's an ill wind that blows no good!

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Fifty Years Ago

# Mouse, Seeking Shelter, Derails Freight Train

By DOROTHY J. CLARK

A half century ago, a most unusual train wreck happened on Terre Haute's south side.

Early on the morning of Jan. 17, 1924, with the thermometer standing at 4 degrees below zero, Engine No. 8287 of the Milwaukee Railroad left the West Clinton Yards and headed south, for Terre Haute and southern Indiana coal fields. At the throttle was Engineer Hovey Anderson, with Don Hunter, fireman, and Iler G. Boyd, conductor, in charge of the slowly moving train of about 50 empty coal cars.

About 25 miles south of West Clinton, near the south edge of Terre Haute's city limits, as the train approached the C. & E. I. (now L. & N.) Railroad crossing, the engineer found the top arm and the green light of the home signal indicating that the way was clear and that he could proceed.

However, although the signal showed clear, the derail was set for derailment, and the huge 350,000 lb. engine toppled over into the ditch. Engineer Anderson, Fireman Hunter, and Conductor Boyd, who was riding in the cab at that time, all jumped to safety on the fireman's side and escaped serious injury.

Investigators at the wreck scene found the crushed and frozen body of a mouse in the electric mechanism box which controlled the home signal of the Belt Junction interlocking plant. Because of the great distance from the interlocking plant or tower to the signals and derails, Belt Junction tower was entirely electric while most interlocking plants were mechanical. The body of the mouse was thought to have caused a short circuit which in turn caused the signal not to function properly.

The crew of Extra 8287 and the tower operator, Millard S. French, were absolved of all blame. Because of the darkness and distance from the tower, the operator could not have noticed the signal arm and light standing clear. The wreck, no doubt, could have been averted had it been daylight. The operator in such a case, noting the signal standing clear, could have cleared the derail until the trouble with the signal was ascertained and remedied.

With the aid of two wreckers, at a cost of $2,400.00, and after a thorough check and overhauling, Engine 8287 was later placed back on the rails and continued in service on the Milwaukee Road. However, in a general renumbering program of locomotives, the number was changed to 568 in 1939.

Millard S. French, the tower operator, is now deceased. The three crew members have been located. They are Engineer Hovey Anderson, who lives at RR 3, Brazil, Ind.; Fireman Don Hunter, 2611 Poplar St., Terre Haute; and Conductor Iler G. Boyd, 1181 S. Adams, Fort Worth, Texas.

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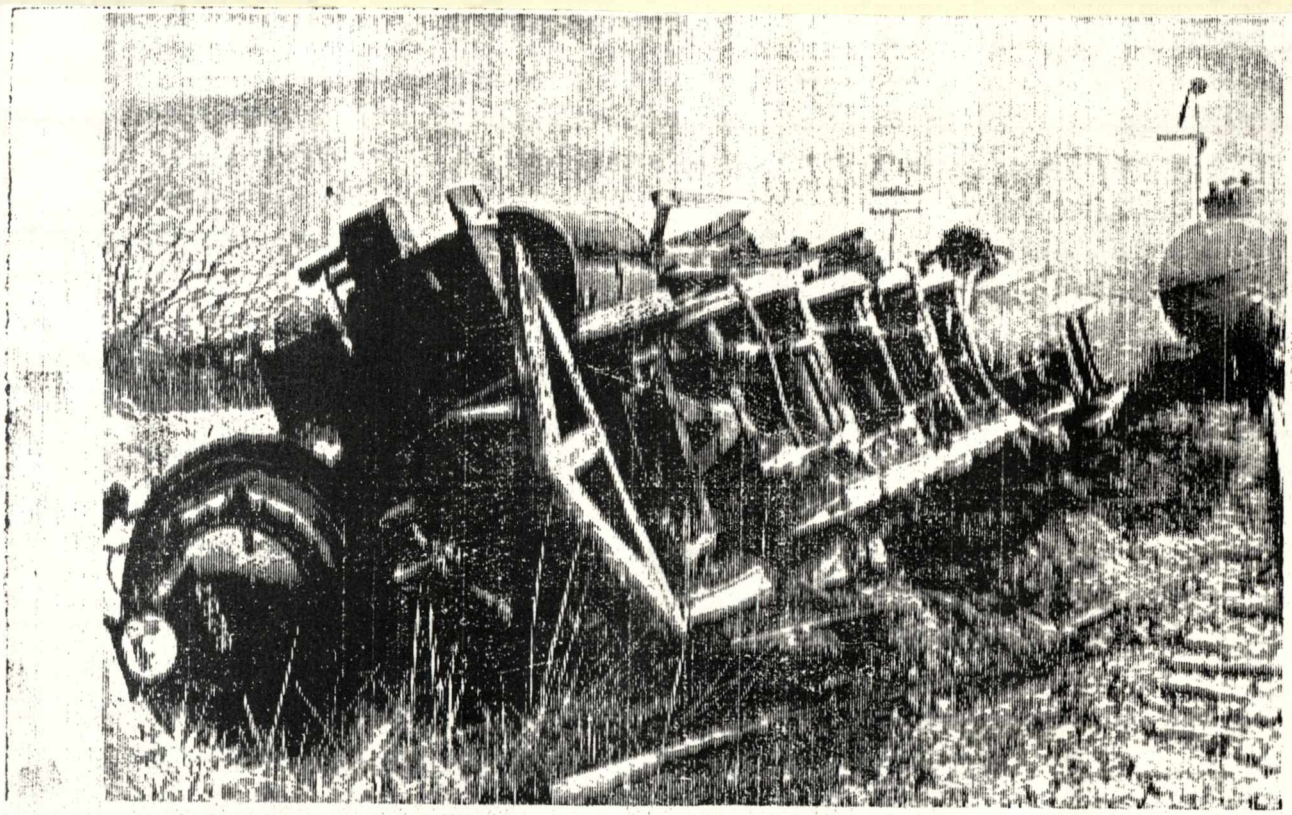

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER--An unusual train wreck occurred in Terre Haute 50 years ago when a tiny mouse caused the overturning of a 350,000-lb. locomotive on the Milwaukee Railroad. There were no injuries in the mishap—except to the mouse and the locomotive. The original photo belongs to Don Hunter.

# Historically Speaking

Ts DEC 1 2 1976

Community Affairs File

By DOROTHY J. CLARK

Many a staid and dignified gray-headed citizen of Terre Haute before the turn of the century smiled and chuckled softly in memory of the happy and lusty days of his youth when he "ran with the machine" and fought valiantly to put out fires and at the same time tried to be sure his particular company arrived at the fire first.

It matters little whether he struggled in the interest of Vigo No. 2, the Northern Liberty, or the Niagara, the time was, to every old volunteer fireman, the heyday of his existence.

Vigo No. 2 was the first regularly organized fire company in Terre Haute. It was formed in 1855. Previously, nothing in the way of a fire-fighting machine existed in town except an old and dilapidated hand-brake called "Old Hoosier".

With the advent of the Vigos and their ownership of a then, up-to-date Hunniman Machine, came a spirit of competition that soon resulted in the organization of a second company with the rousing title of "Northern Liberties", composed principally of Alton Railroad men from the north end of town. They rehabilitated "The Old Hoosier", rechristened her "The Deluge", and enthusiastically demanded a share of the public's plaudits.

In 1857, a third company called "The Niagaras", made their bow and entered the lists for honors; this company, like the "Northern Liberties", was principally composed of railroad men belonging to the Indianapolis and Evansville Railroad.

With these three organizations in active operation, the embryo city was well supplied with active fire fighters. In fact, the competitive spirit was so great between them, and the desire to get "first water", so intense, that many suspicious blazes occurred that would invariably find one or the other of the companies all ready to make a quick run to add new laurels for their beloved machine. It came to be generally understood that old canal boats, isolated shanties, and the like, stood a poor chance for existence if they were favorably located for making a run.

Because the citizenry took such an interest in the fire companies, it was possible to update equipment through public subscription purchases. The Northern Liberties purchased a brand new Jeffers hand engine. The Niagaras bought a powerful Button machine to replace their cumbersome double-deck, end machine, purchased in Cincinnati in 1857, and much too heavy for quick progress through the deep sand of which most of the streets were composed. The Niagaras had to put up with much laughter and sarcastic comments when stuck on their way to fires while their more lightly equipped competitors ran quickly past.

Squire Alex. Thomas was the last president of the company when it disbanded in 1868.

In 1859, the city council first granted a regular amount to assist the expenses of the different companies. In that year, $160 was voted to each engine company, and $120 to the newly-formed Hook and Ladder Company.

These were the "heyday" years of the volunteer fire fighters. No public function was complete without a parade of its members. Their scarlet shirts brightened every fair ground and their annual tournaments formed the social climax of each years' glory.

Many stirring contests were bravely fought, and trophies proudly won, including the silver trumpet now at headquarters.

Volunteer fire laddies recalled with pleasure and regaled their friends and families with accounts of the historic contest held at the Fairgrounds between the Vigos, Northern Liberties and Niagaras, won by the Vigos, who triumphantly bore their captain, John Bryan, back to town on their shoulders and rounded out the day's victory with a grand ball—the memory of which still tickled the toes of many a sedate grandfather in the retelling.

The Washingtons, organized in 1859, failed to secure an engine, and disbanded the same year. Also, the Eagles No. 4, a company of very young men whose frolicsome aim was to beat the runs of older companies rather than to fight fires.

Of the old machines, some were broken up and all were scattered. The old Hunniman engine of the Vigos No. 2 remained in service at Jasper, Ind. Capt. John Bell and others tried to buy it back and return it here as a relic of the

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over

old days.

The Button machine of the Northern Liberties was purchased by Crawfordsville, Ind., and supposedly remained there. The "Kate Tousey", named in honor of a daughter of Ralph Tousey, hose machine of long and faithful service with the Vigos, was smashed and dismantled about 1876.

Following the volunteer fire companies were the paid companies. Engine Co. No. 1 was organized upon the arrival of the steamer, Albert Lange No. 1. This first company was located at Lafayette and Linton streets (Sycamore). This firehouse has been torn down. Sid Temple was the first engineer, and John A. Bryan was the fire chief.

Company No. 2 was organized in 1868 as a paid force at Fourth and Walnut, in the old market house, with Ben West as engineer and Capt. John D. Bell as chief. There were four companies. Nos. 1, 2, 4 and 5 were hose companies, and No.1 had the old village one-horse truck.

# Historically Speaking

By Dorothy Clark

Ts APR 2 9 1979

Indiana Counties — Vermillion



Ts APR 2 9 1979

# Disasters at Dorner, Clinton . .

Most readers have heard of the Fontanet powder mill explosion, and the equally disastrous explosion at Sandford, but how many have knowledge of the powder mill explosion at Dorner, two miles southeast of Newport, in Vermillion county, Ind.?

On May 4, 1904, four men were killed and many more were injured when the explosion occurred at noon. The scene of the disaster was in a little hollow leading off from the main hollow which ran east and west.

At the time, 400 kegs, weighing 25 pounds each, a total of 10,000 pounds of damp blasting powder blew up. The woods caught fire from the terrible blast and the available manpower was hard pressed to keep the flames from reaching the other side of the hill, where 250,000 pounds of powder were stored in the magazines of the Dupont powder works.

Henry Griffin and DeSoto Biggs, two of the unlucky workmen, were blown literally to bits. The combined weight of the two men was about 300 pounds, and only 60 pounds of scattered fragments of human remains could even be gathered together. The other two killed were brothers, George and Berkley Mayhew.

Only two of the fourteen buildings were destroyed, and they were never rebuilt. An almost endless litigation ensued for damages upon the part of the deceased men's families, some of whom compromised and received small amounts

Clinton. John Potts, who was on his father's farm a mile away, was knocked down by the explosion. The county poor farm suffered twenty broken windows, and pieces of metal shafting weighing 600 pounds were hurled a half mile from the blast and planted in the earth.

At the glaze, a spring of water "never before observed by man" started flowing from the hill. Men who were searching for bodies came across 25 copperhead snakes who were stunned from the explosion. Because they had been in hibernation they were slow-moving and easily exterminated.

### Dynamiters

Clinton and vicinity has been the scene of terrible dynamiter's work, including the blowing up of the Catholic church and, a few month's later, the partial destruction of the piers of the Chicago and Eastern Illinois railroad bridge at Clinton.

The latter explosion was on April 19, 1910, when two explosions occurred. The shock was felt at Dana, Hillsdale and Terre Haute. The guilty ones were never captured, although large rewards were offered and detectives hired. The city offered $1,000 and the railroad company, $3,000. Bloodhounds were used, but were not successful

The partial destruction of the beautiful and massive Roman Catholic church at Clinton, supposed to have been the work of someone not satisfied with the priest in

The Clinton "Saturday Argus" stated, "The new Sacred Heart Roman Catholic church was partially wrecked at 11:45 Tuesday night by the explosion of three sticks of dynamite. The explosions were so terrific that almost the entire windows were blown out of many of the houses in that part of the city. A police force was at once sent for by calls and the night officers responded, but no trace could be found that afforded any clue to the deed.

"The damage done will amount to over one thousand dollars on which there is no insurance," the account went on to state. "Wednesday the city council met and voted to offer a thousand dollars reward for the arrest and conviction of the miscreants. Seventy-nine sticks of dynamite were found at the church on Wednesday morning, which had they gone off would have destroyed at least the southern half of the city. A call has been made for a Pinkerton detective and no pains or expense will be spared to bring the guilty parties to justice."

A month later, property owners near the church still lived in constant fear of another disaster. Some families rented rooms downtown where they could have police protection, and others refused to sleep in their homes. Some tried to sell their properties. The Catholic authorities employed all-night church guards, and replaced Father Maher. No clue was ever found as to the person or persons responsible for the dynamiting.

### Unsolved Crime

Another unsolved crime of Vermillion

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county occurred during the early morning hours of Oct. 12, 1883 at the home of Elias Lamb, near Newport. Lamb, his wife and a married daughter who was visiting them from Fort Wayne, were awakened by the dog's barking.

The Lambs took turns getting up to see what was the matter, but went back to bed after seeing nothing unusual. Suddenly two burglars crashed in the door and demanded money. Lamb gave them all he had, and his wife was forced to go upstairs for $1.75 more.

Angered because of the small amounts, the burglars demanded more or they would kill the family. When Lamb protested that there was no more money, they began to beat him, then fired two shots, one grazing Mrs. Lamb's head and splitting open her ear. Lamb, although badly bruised and one eye swollen shut, managed to get outdoors and pulled the bell rope, which frightened the men away.

The daughter, who was sleeping in another room, crawled under the feather bed and escaped discovery. The Lambs' son, John, who was asleep in his house some hundred yards away, heard the bell and ran to their aid. He stayed with them until daylight, fearing the return of the ruffians, and then went for the doctor.

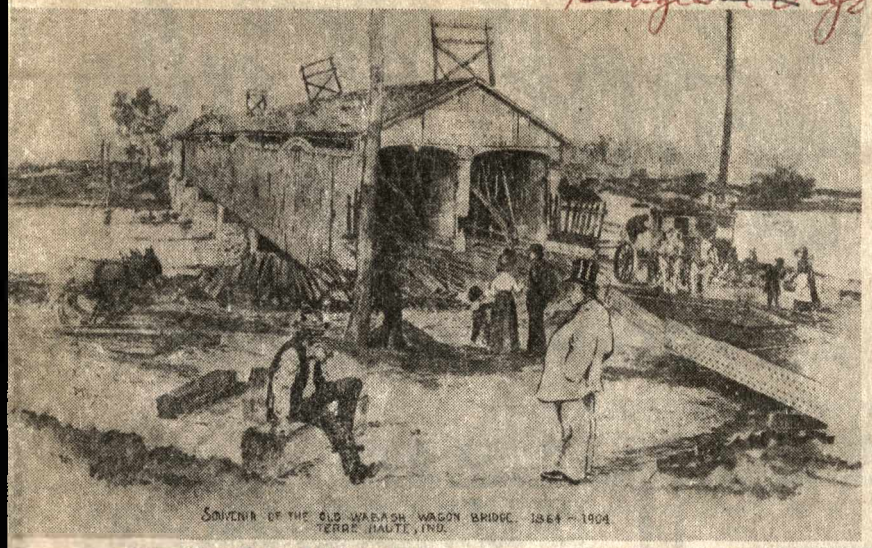
Tracks of the robbers were traced both ways, between the Lamb house and town, but no further clue was ever found.

from the company.

The explosion was charge of the time, occurred heard at Terre Haute and ish at the time, occurred in November, 1909.

# Shades of 'Death Lane' still evident across bridge

Bridges-Briges Co.




**Old Wabash Bridge, 1864-1904, in Terre Haute**

## Historically Speaking

By Dorothy Clark

T's MAR 3 0 1980

A century ago, the road west from the river bridge was called "Death Lane." It was dangerous in daylight, and even more so after dark.

Many accidents occurred because the grade of the National Road was too narrow, 20-30 feet high, and not much more than half as wide on top, with no guard rails. Two heavily loaded wagons did not have room to pass each other.

Since the county purchased the river bridge and made it toll-free, it was considered the duty of Sugar Creek Township to keep the road in repair, but the county commissioners had the ultimate responsibility for public safety.

In 1879, Dr. Link was hurrying to see a patient in Macksville (West Terre Haute) and was thrown from the top of the grade, breaking his arm in the 30-foot fall. The good doctor recovered. Nothing was said. The road was not fixed, and time passed.

On the evening of April 1, 1880, a wagon carrying 14 persons on their way to a revival meeting in Macksville was thrown off the trestle on the grade and two of the party drowned.

The driver of the express wagon, Joseph M. Ellison, 1428 Main St., was hired to take the group to a protracted meeting. He drove to the Mont Rose school house where he took in several, and from there to Second Street, where there were several more waiting, 14 in all.

They left the covered river bridge at nearly 8 p.m. There was a slight mist falling, and the night was intensely dark. The willows along either side of the grade made the drive dark and dismal on a clear night.

The horses were allowed to walk, and the party was in a happy mood, laughing and joking, as the cumbersome wagon moved slowly along. Ellison could only see a few feet ahead, when suddenly the wagon reeled, fell, and rolled down the north side of the grade. The river had been rising for several days, and covered the bottom lands. Of course, all went into the water.

The driver could remember but little of what happened. He remem-

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bered the screaming of the women, the splashing and noise made by the men, women and horses struggling in the water. The water was no more than four feet deep, and Ellison carried two women to shore. He was so frightened and excited he could scarcely get home, which he did by riding the horse that escaped (the other horse drowned).

The bridge caretaker, Peter McKenna and Officer Coughlin confirmed the drowning of Ella E. Hanna, 17, and Mrs. George M. Otterman, 30.

Miss Hanna's body was found caught between the wheels. In the struggle she had clutched a spoke in the wheel and held to it with a death grip. Mrs. Otterman's body was caught by the current and found the next morning floating in a deep pool about 100 yards south of the bridge. She was the wife of a former policeman who was the head blacksmith at the blast furnace.

When the newspaper reporter reached the residence of Samuel P. Hanna, 1620 Oak, a dimly lighted home out on the prairie, it was filled with sympathizing friends. The body of the dead girl lay on a pallet hastily prepared.

According to Mr. Hanna, a night watchman at the nailworks, he was off duty and was attending the religious revival at Mont Rose, conducted by the Rev. Van Cleave. Hanna was the organizer of the party to attend the Macksville revival.

Included in the party were Mrs. Otterman, Mrs. W. R. Landrum, Mrs. Bell, Charles Meeker, Ida Meeker, George Hughes, Susie and Lizzie Helmkamp, Mr. and Mrs. Hanna and their daughter, Ella. There were four men and 10 ladies.

The reporter told of walking through the covered bridge the night of the tragedy. "The lamps, placed at regular intervals in the bridge were glimmering and gave the surroundings a cavernous appearance, which was not diminished by the sullen rushing sound of the river which rolled underneath. Not a soul was to be seen."

The morbidly curious crowd had gathered quickly at the scene where men were searching for the bodies. No eye witnesses were still on the scene. It seemed that all who were involved had left the scene as rapidly as possible.

History doesn't change, just the people making it historical. One hundred years later, the morbidly curious are still with us, hampering the rescue efforts and clogging up the roads for the ambulances. The only difference is that the horses are under the hoods of automobiles, not pulling the buggies and wagons. The grade is still dangerous, and traffic accidents occur with great regularity. Which all goes to prove, I guess, that history does repeat itself.

Clark, Dorothy
Railroads (T.H.) Community Affairs File
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*Historically speaking*

# Recall courage and fear of Midnight Cannonball wreck

T s MAR 6 1983

By DOROTHY J. CLARK

One of the most spectacular train wrecks in Indiana occurred March 10, 1897, when the "Midnight Cannonball," the No. 5 going south on the Evansville and Terre Haute Railroad, ran into a washout between Decker Station and Hazleton south of Vincennes.

Engine No. 94 was pulling a baggage car, four coaches, a sleeper, ladies day coach, and a combination smoker and mail car when it left Chicago, stopped at Terre Haute about midnight and continued south.

At least five trains had crossed the iron bridge and trestle successfully in the hours preceding, but steady rains and rising waters in all the rivers and streams were steadily washing away the embankments. It was theorized that ground hogs (woodchucks) had burrowed into the 15-foot embankment along White River to escape the elements, and this had weakened the piers causing it to give way.

The speed of the train was more than conditions warranted, and the engine leaped the gap, breaking loose from the baggage car which plunged into the 40-foot hole, followed by the express car and smoker. The day coach hung just on the verge of the gap, and the sleeper was the only car to remain on track.

The engineer, John McCutcheon, managed to escape from the submerged engine and swim to safety, cut, bruised and scalded. The fireman, Joseph Boleman of Evansville, was buried beneath the engine and killed instantly. He was substituting for George Shewmaker of Terre Haute who was on vacation. This was the second time Shewmaker escaped death on this road. Six years previously he was on the regular run when he laid off and his sub was killed at the wreck near Snap Creek.

Conductor George Sears, also of Terre Haute, was not so lucky. He was killed in the crash and went down in the smoking car.

One of the most appalling things about the accident was the agony experienced by the flagman, Baldwin Hauesien of Evansville. He was caught like a rat in a trap, his foot held securely between the couplings of the smoking car and the day coach. The water continued to rise, and passengers witnessed the mam drowning inch by inch before their very eyes in the mad swirl of water. They were unable to assist him.

Finally one passenger succeeded in reaching the man with an axe and leaned out to chop off the unfortunate man's leg, but his nerve failed him. Unable to save him, the swimmer beat a hasty retreat.

The crowd on the bank turned their heads as the water continued to rise and they realized the man would drown. By some miracle, the buoyancy of the coach was enough to cause it to swerve in the rushing waters and it loosened its hold. The man dragged his leg from between the couplings and crawled to safety.

*So unnerved by his ordeal was he that his hair turned white overnight, and he died four years later in California, never fully recovered from his harrowing experience.*

The train wreck took down the wires, so no details were immediately available. One of the crew had to run back down the track to the next station to call for help.

By daylight, only the last car was still standing on the tracks, and the raging waters soon caused it to fall into at least 10 feet of water. As soon as help arrived, the injured were taken to the hospital in Terre Haute, and the badly frightened survivors were put up in the Terre Haute House and the Filbeck Hotel.

Next day's newspapers told of four known dead, but search parties were still looking for bodies never reported found. Six months afterward the right coat sleeve of the conductor with its gold service stripes was picked up in the brush some distance below the wreck.

The railroad company sent in wrecking crews, and a pile driver was ordered from Chicago. Trains were re-routed until the road was considered safe again.

Henry Brokaw, a Terre Haute resident, told of being in a train wreck in the late 1870s at almost exactly the same spot. He was thrown into the river, but managed to escape by swimming to the *opposite bank carrying with him a young lady member of a theatrical troupe enroute to Evansville.*

Railroaders were a hardy breed before the turn of the century. Lucky Engineer McCutcheon continued to run between Danville and Evansville, handling the Florida Limited down and the Dixie Flyer back every day of the year.

Other names to remember include the Dixie Mail, Dixie Limited, Dixieland, The Meadow Lark, the Humming Bird, The Georgian and the Shawnee. With the 12 passenger trains and some high-class freight trains, it was difficult to understand why a railroad that did such a volume of business could be in receivership so often.

## About The Cover

An old gas pump is a lonely sentinel in a barnyard in southeastern Vigo County . . . Valley Photo by Bill Williams

Vigo County Public Library

# BETWEEN THE LINES

## THE STORY BEHIND THE STORIES YOU READ ABOUT CELEBRITIES

By Josie

***WORST BEHAVIOR OF THE WEEK:***
America's new overnight star, Eddie Murphy, who has all of one film to his credit — a hit, "48 Hrs." — is reportedly causing problems and delays on the set of his new one, "Trading Places," co-starring Dan Ackroyd.

Everyone else shows up on time ready to roll; Murphy doesn't. "A dumb thing to pull at this stage in his career," according to a source close to the film. Also an expensive one.

Charles Haid

**Q.** ***I'm a big fan of Charles Haid who plays Renko on "Hill Street Blues." Could you tell me something about him, like how old he is and if he's married? D.E.E., Lynn, Mass.***

**A.** He's 36 and has been married, but is now separated. He has two daughters, ages 5 and 10. Other personal facts: He grew up in San Francisco, part of a large Irish family, had a strict Jesuit education, spent three and a half years on a submarine with the Navy Submarine Corps and worked as a producer when he couldn't get work as an actor.

Personally, "He really does have a heart of gold," according to a business associate. "And he's hyper. He works hard and he works to get the right things accomplished."

Right now, apart from the series, he's working with something called the Children's Committee 10 to bring kids over from Belfast for a few months and with California conservation committees and the anti-nuclear movement.

He doesn't spend all of his time working, however. "He also likes to go out in his boat and just fish."

***WORST IDEA OF THE WEEK:*** Producer Clyde Ware is looking to put together a film of the life of Tom Mix, the early cowboy movie star. So far, O.K., but for the lead, he wants the non-acting, non-riding baseball star, George Brett. Brett's ready to start his riding lessons as soon as he gets the word.

"Look, George has to have something to do in the off-season," according to his financial manager and brother, Bobby. And he will have some on-camera experience: The first week of February he was scheduled to tape the first episode of a series called "Superstar Athletes" showing famous jocks at home.

George was planning to show off his condo in Palm Springs and talk about his golf game. Somehow, we don't think Olivier started like this...

Margot Kidder and Christopher Reeve

**Q.** ***Please tell me about Margot Kidder. Is there a chance she will work with Christopher Reeve again outside of the "Superman" movies? Is she an American citizen? And what projects does she have lined up for 1983? Mrs. V. Cooper, El Paso, Tx.***

**A.** There's always a chance because the two do get along. Reeve was one of her defenders in her dispute with "Superman" producers Ilya and Alexander Salkind which resolved in her being in "Superman III," but just barely.

She recently starred in a marvelous movie, "Heartaches." Otherwise, she is still a Canadian citizen although she's been living in California, and the only project she has lined up is a Disney comedy called "Trenchcoat" which is due out this spring. She co-stars with Robert Hays and plays a mystery writer on vacation. Her private time is spent, according to her rep, "playing mommy" to Maggie, 6.

Nancy Reagan

### *AW, COME ON NANCY, GIVE US A SONG...*

From Nancy Reagan's deep background comes this sparkling tidbit: Our First Lady used to cut quite a figure on the band shell as a band singer in the early 1940s. "She was a really good girl singer too," explained bandleader I. Newton Perry on a phone call from his Santa Barbara, California home.

"She had a lot of style and a nice voice. And she knew all the hot songs. She did a great one called 'Oh, You Crazy Moon.' We used to play the Wayside Inn in Springfield, I remember. They just loved her."

So, it seems did most of the guys in the band. "Nancy was a hell of a good-looking girl," he says, "But she had to go and marry some actor..."

**Anything you'd like to know about prominent personalities? Write: Josie, SUNDAY WOMAN magazine, 235 E. 45th Street, New York, N.Y. 10017. Sorry, we can't answer any letters individually.**

Ts MAY 1 1983

# Fire destroyed historic landmark

## Historically speaking

By DOROTHY J. CLARK

Over 40 years ago, Vigo County lost two of its most historic landmarks in one year. Only photographs, newspaper clippings, stories and personal memories remain to tell of the existence of two stops on the Underground Railroad.

Even before the capture of Vincennes by George Rogers Clark and his army in 1779, men followed the banks of the Wabash River northward to Detroit, passing through what is now Honey Creek Township, southwest of Terre Haute.

By the time of the War of 1812, a log cabin with a smithy attached had been built on the road which was becoming known as the Harrison Trail. Tools and firearms were made and repaired on the blacksmith's forge. Here shelter of the most primitive kind was provided for man and beast, and early travelers were advised to seek rest and refreshment at this cabin. Later the log cabin was used as the first poor farm in Vigo County.

In 1817 Jesse Jones and his new wife came out from Jamestown, Va., and bought the land where the old log cabin stood. The location was later described as five miles from Terre Haute, one mile west of U.S. 41.

At that time the only road, or trail as it was then, running from Vincennes to Terre Haute came through this property. From Terre Haute the road went on to Lafayette, Fort Wayne and Detroit. The next stop after the Jones farm was Markle's Mill.

The young Joneses cleared ground and planted an orchard. They built a house with walls 12 inches thick. The bricks were made and burned about a mile away at a clay pit and brought to the building site on crude ox carts and sleds.

Captain Griggs' brick yard was just east of the Forks, about one mile south of what is now Allendale. This was the second buick house built in Honey Creek Township, and the third brick house built in Vigo County.

Poplar logs were cut for the studding and joists, and the sheathing was whipsawed. The house was built in an unusual way, probably the only one of its kind in the part of the country. Built on the side of a gently sloping hill and partially built into, one could go directly into the upper story from the high ground, and then by going downstairs, come out on the first floor on the lower level.

The upper story had a living room with the original fireplace and three bedrooms. The lower floor had a dining room, kitchen, bedroom and cellar.

James Jones raised plants, trees and shrubs on his farm and sold them, operating the first nursery business in Vigo County. He kept the plants in the first floor of the house and in the cellar which had a large fireplace in one room. This was where he stored his sweet potatoes during the winter.

Many farmers from as far south as Sullivan would bring their potatoes for storage to Mr. Jones, making the trip on foot or horseback. After leaving the potatoes there, they traveled on to Markle's Mill, six miles north of Terre Haute, to have their grain ground.

Mr. Jones and his wife had seven children, all born and reared in this house. They were Emily Jones Budd, Hector Jones, Samuel T. Jones, America Jones, Kate Jones Blocksom, Elizabeth Jones McCroskey and Ruth Jones Collins.

Following the parents' deaths, the farm was owned by the Jones children until 1913 when it was sold to William J. Clute, a traveling minister. He held the property for seven years, selling it in 1920 to Malcolm A. Steele who had one of the finest dairy farms in Vigo County which produced the only certified milk ever sold here.

Mrs. Steele, the former Nelle Filbeck, was also of local pioneer stock. She and her husband gradually worked the old house over into an attractive and comfortable modern home, retaining the simple lines of the original house.

During the remodeling, the architect noticed a discrepancy in the inside and outside measurements of the living room. A well-concealed secret stairway was found next to the fireplace. Layer upon layer of wallpaper was removed to reveal a small door at one end, up about three feet from the floor. When this was opened, a dark, narrow stairway leading to a small attic room was discovered.

During the years of slavery before the Civil War, this room served as a "station" on the Underground Railroad system by which slaves were smuggled through from the south to Canada and freedom. From here they were sent north to Markle's Mill, the next station.

The Steeles had just about completed the remodeling when fire reduced the historic old landmark to a pile of ruins in May, 1939.

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# without injury
# Valley heritage

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T s JUL 2 2 1984

# '96 fire razed opera house, but

**Historically speaking**

Clark is Vigo County's official historian and formerly worked for The Terre Haute Tribune.

By Dorothy Clark
*Special to The Tribune-Star*

People were already rushing to the opera house when Box 81 was pulled at 8:46 p.m. on the night of July 21, 1896. An hour later the big building which had cost its builders over a quarter of a million dollars in 1870 was completely destroyed.

On the same site, the Spinning Wheel Corner store at the northeast corner of Fourth and Wabash burned to the ground in 1867.

Twelve streams of water were directed on the blaze after the general alarm was turned in 88 years ago, but it was soon apparent that the fire department would be lucky to save the adjoining buildings. The library of A.M. Higgens' law office was carried out by volunteers, but the flames became too intense for further salvage.

The danger from crumbling walls and floors was so great that people were afraid to go in the burning building to rescue items from Leeds' Jewelry, Godecke's Book Store, and Goodman and Hirschler's Clothing Store.

The office of E.C. Ervin, dentist, over Espenhain and Albrecht's was immediately enveloped in flames along with the lodge rooms of Social Lodge No. 86, F.& A.M.

Jacob May's saloon under the stage on North Fourth Street was a total loss. As one after the other of the 50 barrels of whiskey caught fire, the flames would leap to the very top of the charred walls. There was no insurance to cover his $3,000 loss.

At least half a dozen stories were told of the fire's origin. Attorney James Stunkard heard an explosion of some kind as he passed the building shortly before the fire was discovered. Manager Dickson said there were no chemicals or calcium in the theater, as far as he knew.

John McMinn, the theater's stage carpenter, had known some one was sneaking into the building at night to sleep. One night he would find a window open, the next night a lock picked, but he had not been able to catch the culprit. One theory suggested that the "sleeper" struck a match and caught the place on fire, and perished in the holocaust.

In 1870 when the Naylor Opera House was built, it was a handsome brick and stone structure and the pride of Terre Haute. It was five stories high with a frontage of 80 feet on Main Street. The architect was J.A. Vrydagh, and the contractor was James Hook.

The painting contract was given to a painter who later became Sir Robert Buckets, of Oxford, England. It seated comfortably between 1,300 and 1,400 persons, but at times held audiences from 1,800 to 2,000. Local residents marveled at the 6-by-10 foot plate glass windows on the main floor.

The building was a fire trap, however, with an interior built entirely of wood from cellar to garret. If the theater had been filled with people during a performance, when the fire broke out, the loss of life would have been terrible.

Many people realized what an unsafe place it was. Down in the cellar, where the great sills were laid, were the heavy timbers. There was nothing but wood from one floor to another. Big oak timbers supported the big stage, and the dressing rooms were constructed of light pine and poplar boards.

The most dangerous sections were the two stage galleries, one a small "supers" gallery, and the other a mammoth concern for the flymen where the drop curtains were hung. Still higher up was the loft where the dust had been accumulating for 26 years. The robes of Edwin Booth had stirred up some of the dust which lay on the network of pine rafters. Some of it had started toward the ceiling when kicked up by the trim foot of Lizzie Daly.

It was in this mass of rubbish, broken scenery and opera house paraphernalia that the fire started. Robert Thompson, merchant policeman, and young Charles Ryan were the first to notice the building was on fire. By the time the fire department arrived, the streets were blocked with sightseers. Never before had a fire in Terre Haute attracted so many people. Police were called in from surrounding districts to control the crowds, and by the time the water was turned on, the streets had been roped off and the firemen had a clear field.

As far away as Clinton and Dana the fire caused excitement. Clinton residents watched the fire from store rooftops. The Clinton city council was in session, but when the news came that Terre Haute was on fire, several men came down in a horse and buggy to help. They

Vigo County Public Library

returned to Clinton on a late train.

At three o'clock the next morning, Chief Goodman was still tramping through the ruins with Assistant Chief Shuster and his men. Every foot of available hose was in use 15 minutes after the alarm. It was evident the city needed new fire hose when some of it burst and lowered water pressure.

It had rained for three hours and the firemen were wet as rats, cold and stiff when they picked up their hoses and loaded their wagons at daylight. Two companies continued pouring water into the building until 9 a.m.

As the beautifully painted ceiling and great chandelier fell into the flaming ruins, many people recalled celebrities who had appeared on the Naylor Opera House stage. They remembered the famous John E. Owens who opened with Solon Shingle and Major DeBoots; Neilson as Juliet; E.L. Davenport; John McCullough; Mrs. D.P. Bowers; Caroline Richings Bernard; Edwin Booth; Lawrence Barrett; Emma Abbott; and J.K. Emmett.

Others who appeared were: Victoria and Rosina Vokes, Annie Pixley, John T. Rayumond, George Knight, Ben DeBar, Ringold in "Henry V," and Frank Mayo. Many recalled wonderful performances of Joe Jefferson Salvini, Nat Goodwin, Fred Warde, Louise James, McKee Rankin, Mrs. John Drew, Lottia, Julia Marlowe, Lily Langtry and Clara Louise Kellogg.

Famous lecturers included Henry Ward Beecher, Oliver P. Morton, Eugene Field and Bill Nye. All of the popular minstrels, artists of renown in their line when 13 was a lucky number, had appeared here.

One downtown business man remarked after the Naylor Opera House burned down, "Were it not for the loss to the people whose investments are in the building, I would be glad to see it burn. It is thoroughly unsafe, a fire trap of the worst kind."

It must be pointed out that this public building was built according to the style of the day. Shops, stores and professional offices occupied the ground floor and all other rooms in the large building not occupied by the theater portion. Access to the theater on the second floor was gained by a wide stairway from the sidewalk. Spectators were correct in saying it would have been impossible to get a "standing room only" crowd safely down that one staircase to the street. The loss of life would have been in the thousands.

Clark, Dorothy

# 1909 fire brought down curtain – and walls

Ts JUN 21

## Historically speaking

Clark retired as The Tribune-Star women's editor in 1980. She has written a local history column for 30 years. She is Vigo County Historian.

**By Dorothy J. Clark**
*Special to The Tribune-Star*

Fire broke out in the Coliseum Theater at Eighth and Cherry streets on Nov. 9, 1909, and for a time threatened the entire business district in Terre Haute.

Before the walls fell, however, theatergoers already were discussing what the future might be for the city. It was hoped the Shuberts would become interested in the erection of a new opera house.

The Coliseum was poorly arranged for the Shubert kind of shows. Independent producers had approached the Masonic order to build a show house in connection with a Masonic Temple.

Manager of the Coliseum, Harry Bronson, had four years to run on his lease, and if he could get an extension he thought about building a new show house on the property. The burlesque shows he had brought to the city were very popular and had proven to be big money makers.

It was reported that John G. Heinl, owner of the Coliseum property, might find partners to build a new show house at Eighth and Cherry streets.

The Coliseum was originally built for a roller polo rink when that game was a fad. Two seasons proved profitable before the sport was discontinued and the Coliseum was rebuilt for stage productions.

Old-timers regretted the destruction of the livery stable at Ninth and Cherry streets. No one could recall exactly when it was built, but believed it was as far back as the early 1850s.

In the days of the old market stands before the Civil War, the building was used as one of the city's market houses. The others were located in an early city hall, and the early fire house at Ninth Street and Lafayette Avenue.

The Cherry Street market flourished until the early 1860s and was the last of the three to be abandoned. After that for a time it was used as fire headquarters, not passing out of public use until about 1876. When the new fire headquarters was completed, the old market house was sold and later was fitted up for use as a livery stable.

Harry Bronson believed the fire started from the careless use of a match or a cigarette by someone sleeping in the building. For some time he had noticed signs of entry.

The loss of the Coliseum was estimated at $17,000, partly covered by insurance. J. Lewis, owner of the livery barn, was fully insured for his $3,000 loss. Nelson Norris who ran the saloon in the Coliseum had no insurance. His loss was $1,000 plus $800 stock of Budweiser.

June Larlan, liveryman, was fully insured for his $1,500 loss of buggies, harness, hay and grain.

Two badly injured firemen buried beneath a falling wall of the building were rescued. They were John Bayless, 29, captain of headquarters company, and Arthur Ballenger, driver of the No. 5 hose wagon.

Arriving at the scene, the two men were beginning to drag the hose through the alley in the rear of the show house when the high wall of the "loft" began to totter. Other firemen gave the warning and ran, but these two men holding the nozzle could not so easily escape. Three parts of the wall and scenery frames fell with a terrific crash and both men were pinned to the pavement in the alley, while the top of the debris was a seething mass of flames.

The entire fire department was directed to saving the men and three lines of hose were turned on the mass. As soon as the fire was checked, Fireman Scott Dennis procured jacks and raised the mass, crawled under the debris, and dragged the captive firemen to safety. Both men were taken to St. Anthony's Hospital with broken bones, multiple wounds and internal injuries, but were expected to live.

John Smallwood of Indianapolis was injured by falling glass from the Bement-Rea Building.

Frank Hawkins of Robinson, Ill., was struck by a live wire and slightly burned. Fred Osburne, night man at Harlan's livery barn, was kicked while releasing the horses when the fire jumped over to the livery barn.

The next morning, the Terre Haute Star displayed six pictures of the fire showing the wreckage about the theater entrance, the wrecked walls of the old stable, firemen playing hose on the blazing debris, the two firemen who were rescued, and Harry Bronson wearing a derby, with Electrical Inspector Davis, viewing the ruins.

It was a drastic way to end burlesque in Terre Haute for some time to come.

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# Burned out, built up

Clark, Dorothy

## Downtown fires brought needed renovations

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**Historically speaking**

Clark retired as The Tribune-Star women's editor in 1980. She has written a local history column for 30 years. She is Vigo County Historian.

**By Dorothy J. Clark**
*Special to The Tribune-Star*

Fires often led to improvements in the early days of Terre Haute, especially when the block west of the courthouse square burned down in 1850. These business buildings had long, sloping roofs divided into sections by low brick walls, from which the chimneys rose.

The newspapers told of the handsome appearance of the new buildings and the row of small square windows in the top of those along the north side of Wabash Avenue.

In more ways than one, 1850 was the end of one period and the beginning of another. Gentlemen wore stocks and dickeys and strapped their pantaloons under their boots. Girls on skates would have been a phenomenon. All men chewed fine-cut, and the spittoon stood in the family pew.

In 1851, two of the Terre Haute newspapers, the Wabash Courier and the Express started daily editions. Fading away was the custom of filling space with lengthy poems on the front page.

The editor of the Courier, Jesse Conard, had enough spare moments to write two novels while he was employed there. He published "Mount Echo" and "Stephen Moreland."

The items of most constant interest in the newspapers of the time were the newly-discovered gold in California, together with ways and means of getting there; the cholera epidemic; the trial of Professor Webster in Boston for the murder of Dr. Parkman; and the concert tour of Jenny Lind under the management of P. T. Barnum.

The old Indois Hotel was built about 1844 by John D. Early. It had several earlier names. In 1854 an upper floor was added, making it the first four-story building in Terre Haute. The rear rooms fronting on Second Street were added at the same time.

According to A. R. Markle, Chauncey Rose built the Rose Building at the northwest corner of Second and Ohio streets before 1834 when the branch of the State Bank was organized in it that year.

The Southern Bank of Indiana also was opened in this building as was the Prairie City Bank. It was razed for the erection of City Hall.

The building known as Memorial Hall was built by the branch of the State Bank and first occupied by them in 1836, immediately on completion.

On the corner east of it stood the Scott Building erected by Lucius H. Scott in 1824. It was said to have been the first brick building in Terre Haute, but the Gilman's pork-packing plant office is generally accepted to have preceded it by a year.

There was a building boom in downtown Terre Haute in the 1850s. George W. Bement constructed his wholesale grocery business building in 1851 at the northeast corner of First and Wabash. When he moved farther east in 1867, the old building was taken over by Baurmeister & Busch, also wholesale grocers.

The Warren Block on the southside of Wabash west of Fourth Street was opened to tenants in 1853, with the Southern Bank on the corner. In 1858 the bank moved to their new building at the southeast corner. The older building was taken over by Edsall & Co., the predecessors of the Root Store.

Next to the bank, while in the Warren Block, was Dr. Mahan. At the corner of the alley, S. H. Potter had a hardware store, and two doors east, where the Savoy Theater used to be, was the store of F. T. Hulman in his second location in town.

In the rear of this block on Fourth Street was the Post Office in a building erected especially for its purpose, and over it was the printing plant of the Terre Haute Journal.

Colonel Cookerly, the editor, was a Democrat and opposed to the Civil War. On the evening of Oct. 21, 1861, soldiers from Camp Vigo located at the old Fair Grounds on North Seventh Street, stormed the plant and destroyed everything in it.

Type, paper, broken parts of the presses, and the office furniture were thrown into the street. Never before had Terre Haute experienced such destruction by an angry mob of soldiers.

The National House was built by John B. Ludowici in 1853. It stood at the southwest corner of Sixth and Wabash, extending to the alley. From Sixth to Fifth on Wabash, the entire block was built as one structure by the several owners. Part of it stood for many years with many alterations made as owners and new uses for the buildings happened along.

The courthouse of 1850, which stood where the present one stands, was a square, two-story building, similar to the old state house at Corydon, with a hip-roof surmounted by a slender tower which terminated in a small, round dome.

In 1849 the building and its surroundings moved one of the newspapers to say that it was a "handsome piece of architecture surrounded by locusts and enclosed with good palings." The north and west sides of the square were lit up, according to the account, "so as to amount almost to an illumination."

An editorial tried to answer letters to the editor. "We cannot answer how much the county gets for pasturing horses, hogs and cows. How the young trees got skinned could not be answered."

# BETWEEN the LINES by G.L.C.

After spending nearly 60 years in Vermillion County I thought I had at least heard about everything that has ever happened here. But I had never heard of Dorner nor the terrible explosion there early in the century.

But back in 1979 Dorothy Clark, who chronicles historical bits for the Terre Haute *Tribune Star*, told the story. A clipping was found recently in the files of Mrs. Edith (Forte) Grimes and passed along to me by Irma Pesavento.

So because it is so interesting and giving credit to Dorothy Clark, I want to pass her article along to you. — GLC

*****

**by Dorothy Clark**

Most readers have heard of the Fontanet powder mill explosion, and the equally disastrous explosion at Sandford, but how many have knowledge of the powder mill explosion at Dorner, two miles southeast of Newport, in Vermillion County?

On May 4, 1904, four men were killed and many more were injured when the explosion occurred at noon. The scene of the disaster was in a little hollow leading off from the main hollow which ran east and west.

At the time, 400 kegs, weighing 25 pounds each, a total of 10,000 pounds of damp blasting powder blew up. The woods caught fire from the terrible blast and the available manpower was hard pressed to keep the flames from reaching the other side of the hill, where 250,000 pounds of powder were stored in the magazines of the Dupont powder works.

Henry Griffin and DeSoto Biggs, two of the unlucky workmen, were blown literally to bits. The combined weight

**Completed on Page 4**
**Column 1**

of the two men was about 300 pounds, and only 60 pounds of scattered fragments of human remains could even be gathered together. The other two killed were brothers, George and Berkley Mayhew.

Only two of the fourteen buildings were destroyed, and they were never rebuilt. An almost endless litigation ensued for damages upon the part of the deceased men's families, some of whom compromised and received small amounts from the company.

The explosion was heard at Terre Haute and Clinton. John Potts, who was on his father's farm a mile away, was knocked down by the explosion. The county poor farm suffered twenty broken windows, and pieces of metal shafting weighing 600 pounds were hurled a half mile from the blast and planted in the earth.

At the glaze, a spring of water "never before observed by man" started flowing from the hill. Men who were searching for bodies came across 25 copperhead snakes who were stunned from the explosion. Because they had been in hibernation they were slow moving and easily exterminated.

**Dynamiters**

Clinton and vicinity has been the scene of terrible dynamiter's work, including the blowing up of the Catholic church and, a few months later, the partial destruction of the piers of the Chicago and Eastern Illinois railroad bridge at Clinton.

The latter explosion was on April 19, 1910, when two explosions occurred. The shock was felt at Dana, Hillsdale and Terre Haute. The guilty ones were never captured, although large rewards were offered and detectives hired. The city offered $1,000 and the railroad company, $3,000. Bloodhounds were used, but were not successful.

The partial destruction of the beautiful and massive Roman Catholic church at Clinton, supposed to have been the work of someone not satisfied with the priest in charge of the Clinton parish at the time, occurred in November, 1909.

The Clinton "Saturday Argus" stated, "The new Sacred Heart Roman Catholic church was partially wrecked at 11:45 Tuesday night by the explosion of three sticks of dynamite. The explosions were so terrific that almost the entire windows were blown out of many of the houses in that part of the city. A police force was at once sent for by calls and the night officers responded, but no trace could be found that afforded any clue to the deed.

"The damage done will amount to over one thousand dollars on which there is no insurance," the account went on to state. "Wednesday the city council met and voted to offer a thousand dollars reward for the arrest and conviction of the miscreants. Seventy-nine sticks of dynamite were found at the church on Wednesday morning, which had they gone off would have destroyed at least the southern half of the city. A call has been made for a Pinkerton detective and no pains or expense will be spared to bring the guilty parties to justice."

A month later, property owners near the church still lived in constant fear of another disaster. Some families rented rooms downtown where they could have police protection, and others refused to sleep in their homes. Some tried to sell their properties. The Catholic authorities employed all-night church guards, and replaced Father Maher. No clue was ever found as to the person or persons responsible for the dynamiting.

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Community Affairs File

## Unsolved Crime

Another unsolved crime of Vermillion County occurred during the early morning hours of October 12, 1883 at the home of Elias Lamb, near Newport. Lamb, his wife and a married daughter who was visiting them from Fort Wayne, were awakened by the dog's barking.

The Lambs took turns getting up to see what was the matter, but went back to bed after seeing nothing unusual. Suddenly two burglars crashed in the door and demanded money. Lamb gave them all he had, and his wife was forced to go upstairs for $1.75 more.

Angered because of the small amounts, the burglars demanded more or they would kill the family. When Lamb protested that there was no more money, they began to beat him, then fired two shots, one grazing Mrs. Lamb's head and splitting open her ear. Lamb, although badly bruised and one eye swollen shut, managed to get outdoors and pulled the bell rope, which frightened the men away.

The daughter, who was sleeping in another room, crawled under the feather bed and escaped discovery. The Lambs' son, John, who was asleep in his house some hundred yards away, heard the bell and ran to their aid. He stayed with them until daylight, fearing the return of the ruffians, and then went for the doctor.

Tracks of the robbers were traced both ways, between the Lamb house and town, but no further clue was ever found.

# Normal School burned quickly

## Everyone lost in city-state squabble over insurance

Clark, Dorothy
IS APR 07 1991

**Historically speaking**

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**By Dorothy J. Clark**
*Special to The Tribune-Star*

The most unfortunate single catasrophe that could have happened in Terre Haute in 1888 occurred the morning of April 9 when the fine State Normal School building, an institution in which not only the people of Terre Haute but those from all parts of the state took pride, was destroyed by fire.

Nothing was left but the bare, blackened walls after the fierce flames. The alarm was turned in a few minutes before 9 a.m. from Box 15 at the corner of Seventh and Eagle streets. A second alarm from Box 31 called out the entire city fire department.

President W.W. Parsons was on the second floor in the northeast room when he saw police and firemen rush into the building. They informed him the top of the building was on fire.

Parsons scurried all over the building giving the alarm, and in a short time, with assistance from police, the students and their professors were out of the building in good order.

Some 800 students were attending classes. Enrollment in the Normal School stood at 625, with 175 enrolled in the Training School.

The news of the fire spread and crowds rushed to the scene in great excitement, only to find that it was impossible to save the building.

The fire apparently started in the attic among the rafters, and could have been extinguished, probably without much loss, had the firemen been able to get at the flames.

The hatchway to the attic was locked with a large hasp and staple, and the firemen finally had to chop through it with an axe. Valuable time was lost, and the flames spread so rapidly that the firemen were soon forced back.

Chemical Engine Company and Hose Companies Four and Five kept up streams of water in the third story for half an hour until Fire Chief Hunter ordered them out because he feared burning timbers would fall on them. The firemen were actually driven down the stairway in front of the advancing flames. Tongues of flames shot out of the hallway facing Sixth Street, telling the excited crowd that all hope of saving the building was lost.

The seemingly substantial and mammoth brick building burned so quickly it went like tinder. Several explosions of chemicals at intervals plainly told that the laboratory on the third floor was burning.

Outside the firemen turned several streams of water on the building, but they were useless as they could not reach the flames. By 9:30 a.m. the entire building was a mass of flames and the interior walls and floors were falling.

Black clouds of smoke, cinders and burning fragments fell on all the surrounding buildings on Eagle Street and on Sixth Street, even as far as Fourth Street. A number of houses caught on fire in several places, but fortunately the rain prevented other serious damage.

When the firemen realized the Normal School was beyond hope, they turned their attention to the smaller fires. Hose Companies Four and Five and the Chemical Company barely escaped from the building before the roof fell in.

The "Fives" lost six sections of hose. The extension ladder was burned before it could be lowered. Frank Fedde[illegible]n, nozzleman of Chemical had his arm broken by falling roof slates.

Most astonishing was the fact that there was not a penny of insurance on the building or its contents. The city and the state jointly erected the building. The city donated the ground and $50,000, and they both quarreled over whose duty it was to insure it. Total loss was estimated at $225,000. The building cost $189,000 and the library of 2,000 volumes was worth $4,000 to $5,000. It was a classic case of too late to lock the barn door!

It was ironic that Brokaw Brothers delivery wagon was entering the side gate delivery carrying $110 worth of wallpaper for the building when the driver saw the flames.

It was later decided the origin of the fire was a defective flue which caught the rafters on fire.

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* Clark, Dorothy (T)

# Opera house saga continues

Ts DEC 27 1992

## Naylor bought building in 1882; destroyed by fire in '96

*Continued from last week's column.*

In a book published in 1892, the wife of John E. Owens, the actor who performed in the opening night activities at the Opera House, related how he left Cleveland by train in ample time to reach Terre Haute, but was delayed by a collision of freight trains.

He arrived in Indianapolis after 7:30 p.m., after the hour he was due in Terre Haute. A telegram assured him the large audience chose to wait for him.

Arriving in Terre Haute, he drove quickly to the Opera House and broke his record for quick dressing. The curtain rose at 11 p.m., and when he stepped on the stage, the crowd roared their welcome.

The show ended at 2 a.m., a well-enjoyed performance, and the crowd dispersed in excellent humor.

The Terre Haute Opera House was operated by its board of directors for 12 years; but success failed to materialize. Trodding the board here were such notable theatrical stars as Adelaide Nelson in "Juliet," John McCullough, Edwin Booth, Laurence Barett, Emma Abbott and J.I Emmett.

Also, Victoria and Rosina Vokes, Annie Pixley, Frank Mayo, Joseph Jefferson, Nat Goodwin, Louis James, McKee Rankin, Mrs. John Drew, Lily Langtry, Latta, Clara Louise Kellogg and others.

Partly financed by a mortgage held by an eastern firm, the Terre Haute Opera House Co. was taken over by Bissel & Co. of Hartford, Conn.

In 1882, it was purchased by Wilson Naylor for $125,000, with $50,000 in cash and the balance in several pieces of property. It became Naylor's Opera House.

He made improvements — and some very interesting rules. Children in arms were not admitted, but when parents insisted, they were compelled to take the child out if it made a sound. Their money was refunded.

Also, ladies were required to remove their hats — and in those days they were almost as large as umbrellas, decorated with plumes, veils, flowers and birds.

Some of the more memorable events staged there under Naylor's management were James P. Voorhees's first attempt to play "Hamlet," and the fourth annual Indiana Sangerfest featuring Handel's "Messiah" and a number by Weber.

It was the custom in the 1890s to close theaters during the summer months. In 1896, some minor repairs and alterations were going on, and it was noticed the building had been entered. Nothing was stolen, so they supposed tramps were using it as a place to sleep.

On the night of July 22, 1896, fire was seen in the building, and despite efforts of the entire fire department, the building was a total loss.

Whether it was accident or arson never was known. Built before the use of steel and fireproof materials, the timbers spread the fire rapidly with no hope of saving it. It was indeed a fire trap.

If the opera house had been filled with people watching a performance, it is doubtful all could have escaped. Dust accumulation, rubbish, and not enough exit stairways would have caused tragedy.

Terre Haute's 19th century opera house could be summed up in this way: "It was a splendid project, a huge building, a dismal failure, an established success, and a memorable fire."

**Historically speaking**

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